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The Miracle of Missions

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Chaplain Maahs with native leaders at Talabe, Finschhafen, New Guinea

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YOU PROBABLY FEEL about missions as I did before I went to New Guinea. I believed in Foreign Missions for two reasons: first, the Bible says so; second, I know that if the Christian Church doesn't grow it will die. So I preached about missions and urged the members of my church to give for that cause.

I suppose you could call me a professional for you see I've been a Lutheran pastor for over twelve years. I have been educated, trained, and called to the Lutheran ministry. I am sure that the thinking of many of our Lutheran people is comparable to what I was thinking before I saw the mission program of our Church in New Guinea. Our thinking is academic. It is intellectual. And because our minds are in this work but not our hearts our support is only half-hearted and academic. Our Lutheran Church has never gone "all-out" for Foreign Missions.

There are a number of reasons for this. There are the silly arguments that the heathen native is happy and therefore why should we disturb him in his happiness by inflicting our civilization on him? I hope that no one will ever advance that argument to me again for I shall put him down as a fool who doesn't know whereof he speaks. I have seen heathen natives. They were dirty, filthy, fear-ridden, diseased, ill fed, and everything but happy. Their very souls were gripped by a fear and dread of the unknown, the evil spirits which surround their very existence and every act of their daily lives. We know fear, you and I, but it is the fear of unemployment, illness, death. The native knows the fear of superstition which never leaves him a happy moment.

There is the principle of "pay back" which operates all over New Guinea. It is the ancient maxim of "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Villages, separated by only a few miles, are enemies. Somewhere in the past one village has stolen from the other, perhaps a pig or a

woman. This began the whole series of retribution, a devastating cycle of killing. Pay back! The heathen native never knows whether he will be alive the next morning. During the night his enemies may burn down his house over his bead.

All this is hardly the happiness of which those who are hostile toward Foreign Missions, or, at best only lukewarm, speak.

But the main reason why even our Lutheran people have not gone "all out" for Foreign Missions is that we do not take God at His Word. All of us have our own mental reservations. It comes as an actual surprise to us that God's Word will work so well among heathen peoples. People are always amazed when I tell them that there are 60,000 Lutherans in New Guinea and that the mission has accomplished this in less than 60 years. That is, at best, only two generations. Only God could accomplish such a task! It is *The Miracle of Missions*.

I came back from New Guinea with the overpowering conviction that God's Word does work! We have always known this in the Church but the surprising thing is that it works so well. It is the only power that I know of under heaven which can change a smelly, filthy, superstitious heathen native and transform him into a child of God who holds his morning and evening devotions and goes to church twice on Sunday.

If there ever was a group of people who had the opportunity to renounce Christianity it was these Lutheran Christians in New Guinea. Some of the missionaries were removed by the government as early as 1939. Others left the field one step ahead of the Japanese when it became evident that further work was impossible. Still others remained and were taken prisoner by the enemy, and of this number nine lost their lives.

The native was awed by the display of power by the Japanese and certainly was aware of the weaknesses of the white man.



Heathen man afflicted with framboesia.
Are these the happy heathen?

The Lutheran Christian, however, had not been converted to the doctrine of white supremacy but rather to the doctrine of salvation through the merits of Jesus Christ. There can be no argument on this score or any other conclusion. The conversion of the native had been complete. He believed in the God of the Christians and therefore he refused to give up his faith!

In the interior of New Guinea, in the Bena Bena Valley, our Church had established a mission. It had been there only a few years and the impact upon heathendom had not been very pronounced. When I visited the mission station at Asaloka I met a number of boys who were staying at the mission, living off the vegetables in the garden. When I inquired as to why they remained, one of them, a boy of about fourteen, answered, "Me no go back to village. Me no want to be bush kanaka." This lad had a glimpse of Christianity in the short time he had spent at the mission school. He was not turning back!

In New Guinea, as in our own land, women are the staunchest friends of the church. In New Guinea the reason is not hard to find. The women early recognized that in Christianity there was an equality which had always been denied them. Instead of being mere beasts of burden, subject to the whims of their husbands, to be bought and sold as chattels, they envisioned

the state in which they would be recognized as persons with individual rights.

But the testimony as to what Christianity means to the individual applies to the men as well. The release from heathen ceremonies, warfare, the tremendous power of witchcraft, and the eternal feeling of uncertainty and fear—these things are very real to the native of New Guinea. There are no "good old days" among the Christians. When they speak of the heathen era in their own lives their conversation is one of contrast, comparison. They will conclude with their gratitude for the goodness and freedom of the Christian life. Many of them have expressed to me their thanksgiving to the missionaries who came to show them the new way of life.

Now and again one hears the accusation pronounced by those who know nothing about missions that natives such as these are only "rice Christians," that they profess Christianity only as long as they receive something. "Feed him rice," they say, "and he will be a Christian for you. Take it away and he will lapse into heathendom."

The accusation, of course, is ridiculous because it ignores the tremendous power of the Word of God in changing the lives of people. That this power of the Word



Heathen child suffering from framboesia

is a reality is quite evident in our own every-day life. By way of contrast, it is still more evident among the natives of New Guinea.

Let us, for the moment, ignore this power. It is obvious that the rice was removed from New Guinea. The work of the missionaries stopped. How then do you explain the fact that these Christians continued the Christian life and maintained their religious services? Were they waiting for the rice to be returned? Even some of us who were in New Guinea in 1942 weren't quite sure we would win. Others among us thought the war would last at least ten years. I talked to Christian natives as late as August of 1944 who did not know what the war was all about and who was winning. I spent three hours one afternoon at the village of Talabe at Finschhafen giving an orientation lecture to native leaders on the progress of the war.

It would reflect poverty of intellect to conclude that the progress of the war would have any immediate effect on the faith of the native. He was a Christian and he continued his religious life because it was a matter of the utmost conviction with him.

There were the natives in the Madang area who refused to work on Sunday for the Japanese. They were not collaborators any more than our own soldiers who tilled the fields for the enemy in the Philippines. The enemy had the guns. But the native would not work on Sunday because that was God's day. I never saw a native working on Sunday anywhere in New Guinea. The Australian law stipulates that the native will not work on Sunday. The Japanese had no such law but the end result was the same. The native went to church.

There was the woman at the village of Munum Yalu near Nadzab whom I shall never forget. On Saturday the natives had invited me to attend their services the following day. I explained to them that I might be a little late since I had to walk four miles through the jungle mud to reach the village. They promised to wait with the service until I came.

At the close of the service, at which two men had preached sermons, I was invited to speak. In my broken pidgin English I gave them the assurances of our Christian faith and told them that our God would neither leave them nor forsake

them. In conclusion I gave them the promise that our missionaries would return.

As I was walking out of the village to return to my headquarters an elderly woman came up to me and shook my hand. Looking directly into my face she smiled and said, "*Sie sind ein Christ.*" (You are a Christian.) The familiar German words seemed so incongruous coming from this dark skinned woman out there in the jungle of New Guinea. She had learned them many years before, no doubt, from a German missionary. And then it dawned on me that this woman had recognized a kinship between us. We had something in common. We were both Christians. "You are a Christian." No one will ever be able to pay me a greater compliment than this native woman from the village of Munum Yalu.

Then there was Ud at the village of Amele near Madang. I had gone to Madang to communicate with the Christian natives there. I knew Ud was the man I wanted to see, but I had no idea where he might be living. So I went to a native labor camp and spoke to the Australian captain in charge.

The captain called one of the native boys and asked him if he knew Ud. The boy did. Then the captain pointed to me and told the boy that I was a Lutheran who wished to see Ud. The boy smiled and came up to me and shook hands. Yes, Ud would come to see me. What time? That was up to me. I suggested eight o'clock the next morning. The boy said, "Aw right," and I knew Ud would be there.

The next morning at eight I saw Ud, dressed in a new blue lap-lap and wreathed in smiles of welcome. It was when we drove out to Amele in a jeep that I discovered that Ud had walked fourteen miles just to see me. A runner had departed from the labor camp and covered seven miles to the next village. There another runner had traveled the remaining seven miles to Amele. Ud received my message about ten o'clock at night. He took a lantern and began his journey. He hadn't slept all night!

At Amele, Ud showed me his record of ministerial acts. Laboriously he had entered the names of the 154 persons he had baptized during the year 1943. To me this news was sensational! The Japs were in

and around Amele during 1943 but it mattered little to Ud. This faithful pastor continued his ministry.

Then we walked over to see the church. What had been a fine house of God had been reduced to rubbish by one bomb. And then Ud pointed to the cross, standing upright in the tall grass. It had been blown from the church tower and had landed upright on the ground. Ud put his hand on the cross and said, "Bime by we work him new again." Sure they will, new churches will arise in New Guinea because the church is of God and bombs only destroy material things. The spirit remains.

That cross at Amele is symbolic of the indestructibility of spiritual things. Gamaliel, the teacher of St. Paul, said of the Christian movement of his day, "If this work be of men it will come to naught; but if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it." The Christian Church of our day is a miracle of God. It has lasted. The very gates of hell have not been able to prevail against it.

The infant Lutheran Church in New Guinea is a miracle of missions. Surely, it is of God or it would not have withstood the severe testings of this war.

Once again the doors to New Guinea have been opened to our Church. The

opportunities for mission work are tremendous. Verily, the fields are white unto the harvest but the laborers are so few. I can think of no greater challenge to the church than that of Christianizing New Guinea.

If, in the providence of God, we were really serious about New Guinea, I believe we could win it for Christ in our generation. I can see a native church arising among the coconut palms of New Guinea, a native church with several hundred thousand adherents. Native pastors will assume positions of leadership and in due season self-sufficiency will be attained.

But are we serious about New Guinea? In the past we have given so grudgingly of our money and of our sons and daughters. We have been so dubious of God's promises. Now we have seen that God has rewarded our humble efforts in New Guinea beyond all our greatest expectations. We know now that God does mean what He says and His blessing has rested upon our mission.

There is no doubt in my mind that God wants our Church to do this work in New Guinea. I came back from New Guinea as an enthusiast for Foreign Missions. The reason is that I saw it work. I saw *The Miracle of Missions*.



Christian natives at worship



1. Heathen of Bena Bena Valley. 2. Demon trating how lawyer vine must be swallowed as a part of the initiation ceremony whereby a boy becomes a man. No woman or child is permitted to see this ceremony. 3. Heathen boy with head dress of cassowary plumes. Bracelets are of dried pigskin. 4. Christians at worship, Talabe, Finschhafen. 5. Ud and wife. Ud is Christian pastor at Amele, referred to in this pamphlet. 6. Chaplain (Major) Arnold M. Masha. Taken while in New Guinea. 7. Group of Lutherans at Talabe, Finschhafen. In the background is the church they built of their own accord during September 1944 when no white missionary was on the field. 8. Heathen of Bena Bena Valley. 9. Heathen adorned with mother of pearl shell around neck, head dress is of cassowary plumes. 10. Heathen with pagan finery.